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ABSTRACT

There is increasing interest in reviewing teacher hiring procedures in order to answer society's demands that students should be accountable for learning basic skills and teachers should be accountable for proving their general and specific content knowledge. There is a trend toward requiring teachers to pass a state board examination proving competency in their chosen subject area before they are hired. After a selection process has assessed the credentials of graduates and hiring decisions are made, attention should be focused on the process of evaluating teacher performance. Measurement of effective teaching can take several forms, including observations and ratings made by supervisors, administrators, or other teachers. Using tests of teaching skills is another avenue for exploration in the area of evaluating teaching. Measuring the achievement of students to evaluate a teacher's performance, while to an extent valid, is a better technique for evaluating the effectiveness of groups of teachers or of educational programs than for individual teachers. Evaluation has long been a controversial process in education. The foremost goals of teacher evaluation should be to stimulate, upgrade, and better equip teachers being evaluated. (JD)

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A STUDY OF ISSUES INVOLVING TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION

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Accountability, by this time is a term familiar to every educator in New Mexico. This term and its implications for education may become even more familiar in the near future, as the 1980 Legislative Session specifically addressed their concerns involving the area in House Bill 2. This bill appropriated monies "to the State Department of Education for the purpose of conducting an accountability study of student performance as a factor in school accountability and the inclusion of student progress in the evaluation of local school district certified personnel."

Why the legislative interest in accountability? It is the outgrowth of concern that public education is not satisfactorily achieving its goals. The recent economic downturn has placed more demands on public funds. Our citizens are now having to cope with both inflation and recession; the costs of goods and services are steadily rising. Since elected officials are reluctant to raise taxes and government

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has experienced a cost revenue factor, public revenues appear to have reached their limits of availability. In this time of declining enrollments, oversupply of teachers, inflation, and taxpayers who in many instances balk at paying any higher taxes, education is being forced to recognize the basics of business economics - "Are we, as educators, responsible for the resources given us, both human and monetary, in producing an educated citizenry?" "Are the taxpayers receiving a reasonable return on their investment?"

Educators know that it is inappropriate to apply such business terms as supply and demand, product, and input and output to education; but do not misread the public who may. By 1990, there will be more senior citizens over the age of 55 in this country than children of school age. As a result, the majority of the public is losing its direct contact with our school systems. However, through the Legislature, the public is providing education the opportunity to study its concerns, evaluate what has already been done, develop new methods and models, and arrive at programs which will best meet the needs of education and the Legislature.

Evaluation is a systematic process of determining if expectations are being met. It involves the setting of standards, an assessment of accomplishments, the recognition of performance both above and below standards, the selection of courses of action, and the ongoing monitoring of progress. Evaluation enables the educational profession to determine

if it is making the contribution to its students, the community, and society that it was established to do.

An evaluation of teaching performance, be it a part of student progress, increases in the knowledge and skill of the professional educator, and/or contributions to advancement in the field of education, needs to begin with the selection process. The present "oversupply" of teachers means our instructional institutions need not settle for just anyone. Nationally, there is increasing interest in reviewing teacher hiring procedures in order to answer society's demands that as students should be accountable for learning basic skills, so teachers should be accountable for proving their general and specific content knowledge.

The 11th annual Gallup survey of the public's attitude toward public schools, released in Fall, 1979, indicated that 85 percent of the public approved requiring teachers to pass a state board examination proving competency in their chosen subject area before they are hired. Eighty-five percent also agreed that teachers and administrators should be tested every few years. Presently, most activity nationwide focuses on the new or perspective teacher, and much concern centers on minimum competencies in the basic skill areas.

Setting standards for entrance into the ranks of the teaching profession is the next area of exploration. To assist in improving the quality of our teachers, many steps need to be followed before graduates of education schools

receive college degrees and certification. Standards must be established for screening prospective teachers for college entry, and further selection must occur for students participation in field experience.

After a selection process has assessed the credentials of graduates and hiring decisions are made, inquiry should focus on the process of evaluating performance. What do we mean by teacher performance? One definition addresses process, where measurement examines what a teacher does. Here, assessment involves noting and analyzing different teaching styles. However, difficulty arises in determining which style is most effective, since research has not proven that any one teaching approach is universally better than any other. Another definition of teacher performance deals with product, where measurement concentrates on what students do. Various factors must be examined with this approach, including the ability level of learners and their prior achievements, the appropriate use of standardized tests as only one of many influencing variables (with particular attention given to their content and curricular validity), and the difficulty in attributing learning to any single or even mulitple set of teacher characteristics or behaviors. Research, however, indicates that there are a number of associations between academic learning time and student achievement. Findings show that the amount of time that teachers allocate to instruction in a content area is positively associated with

learning. Also, the proportion of allocated time that students are "engaged" (i.e, paying attention) is positively associated with learning. Time spent on task comes through consistently in recent research as the single variable most associated with pupil achievement.

Measurement of effective teaching can take several forms including observations, tests of teaching skills, and/or measures of student growth. In most cases, if evaluation is to focus on what the teacher is doing (process), then the best evaluation plan would involve observations or measures of teaching skills. If, however, assessment concentrates on what students are learning (product), measures of student growth are appropriate.

The most frequently used method for process evaluation is observations and ratings made by supervisors, administrators, or other teachers. These tend to be relatively informal, often amounting to a personal estimate of the quality of teachers' actions. If the observation technique is to be used, there are some rules to follow for developing valid and reliable measures. The dimensions should be significantly related to effective teaching. Although research has not provided impressive evidence concerning the characteristics of an effective teacher, clarity of presentation and knowledge of subject matter do stand out as important contributing factors. The dimensions should also be observable, clearly defined, and placed on an observer's scale, containing three

to seven rating positions. In addition to these points, observations should be made on more than one occasion and involve more than one observer.

Using tests of teaching skills is another avenue for exploration in the area of evaluating teaching. This is an indirect method of estimating what a teacher might do when presented with a series of problems. To use this approach, one must accept the major assumption that a teacher who demonstrates knowledge of effective teaching is more likely to succeed in the classroom than one who does not.

Measuring the achievement of students (the outcome of instruction), is still another means of assessing teachers. Often standardized norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests are used for this purpose. It should be noted that such techniques are better for evaluating the effectiveness of groups of teachers or of educational programs than for individual teachers. One method of using standardized test information involves pre- and post-testing where progress is compared against a norm. Another approach uses statistical tests of significant differences between an experimental and a control situation. A third approach, based on regression analysis, can project future student achievement based on past experience. However, teaching effectiveness cannot be based solely on any of these three proposed methods. At this time it is not possible to find a measure that can reliably and validly separate out any single teacher's contribution

to learning.

No matter what method or combination of methods are used to assess teacher effectiveness, there are certain points to use as guidelines when approaching this sensitive issue. One must know what is being measured or to be measured, and appropriately consider measurement error. The fact that no teaching method has been shown to be superior to any other, and that learning on the part of children is seldom a result of a single causative event or action, must be remembered. Also, one must keep in mind that test results are sometimes a poor indicator of the results of teaching due to problems with curricular validity.

Evaluation, especially evaluation of personnel, has long been a controversial process in education. The foremost goals of teacher evaluation should be to stimulate, upgrade, and better equip teachers being evaluated. Improved evaluation practices will result in a higher level of teacher performance, improved educational services for students, and a more accurate record of the performance of staff members, ultimately enabling school systems to provide a quality accounting of teachers and other personnel. The results of the Legislative Accountability Study being conducted by the New Mexico State Department of Education will provide guidelines, alternatives, methods, and models to assist local education agencies in responding to their public on accountability issues.

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